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Citation

Singapore Management University. Hillary Clinton, The White House and the Trump card. (2016). Perspectives@SMU.

Available at: <https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/pers/132>

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HILLARY CLINTON, THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE TRUMP CARD

Published:
31 Aug 2016



The former First Lady is ahead in the polls but a Trump loss will not spell the end of the Republican Party

In a stinging August editorial the Wall Street Journal slammed the U.S. Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump and his party, urging all involved to get their house in order:

“If they can’t get Mr. Trump to change his act by Labor Day, the GOP will have no choice but to write off the nominee as hopeless and focus on salvaging the Senate and House and other down-ballot races. As for Mr. Trump, he needs to stop blaming everyone else and decide if he wants to behave like someone who wants to be President—or turn the nomination over to Mike Pence.”

Given that Trump is a democratically elected nominee, how legal would such a move be? *Perspectives @SMU* put that question to **Kyle Kondik**, Director of Communications at the University of Virginia Center for Politics.

“The RNC (Republican National Committee) cannot force Trump out – he has to leave on his own volition,” Kondik explained in a panel discussion at a recent SMU School of Social Sciences forum, ‘*The Outlook for the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election and Beyond*’. While Kondik sees no indication of that happening, he cited the example of the 1972 Democratic vice-presidential nomination of Sargent Shriver after the initial candidate, Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton, was forced to withdraw on health concerns.

But even if Trump backs out, nominating a new Republican candidate for the presidency will not be a straightforward procedure.

“There are deadlines to remove a person’s name from the ballot because you need to print ballots and there are certain laws about military personnel having to be sent ballots a certain number of weeks in advance, and we’re coming up to some of those deadlines,” Kondik said, referring to the *Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act* which requires states to send absentee ballots to eligible voters at least 45 days before federal elections, i.e. October 24. “If Trump were subbed out late, maybe he could still appear on the ballot but the votes cast for him would go to the replacement Republican candidate. There are a lot of unanswered questions.”

HAS THE DONALD FINALLY GOT HIS ACT TOGETHER?

With the Wall Street Journal's Labour Day (September 5) deadline looming, Trump appears to finally have gotten the message that the Republican primaries electorate who lapped up his confrontational and controversial persona is different from the general electorate. The week following the Wall Street Journal editorial has brought a noticeable drop in the outrageous outbursts - he was not totally immune, however - and the softening of Trump's much-publicised hardline stance on immigration. Polls that had put Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in double-digit leads now show Trump narrowing that gap.

The improved numbers might convince Trump to bite his tongue and let the spotlight shine on his opponent's flaws.

"Somewhat lost in all this is that this election has been about Trump," Kondik said. "Clinton certainly has a lot of flaws. She has been exposed in telling untruths about her private email as Secretary of State. These are all legitimate questions but these would have gotten more scrutiny had Trump had not been saying outrageous things every day. I do think that if Clinton got into office, suddenly things wouldn't be about Trump anymore; it would be about her."

While poll numbers suggest a Clinton win barring a drastic development, Kondik cited the 'shy Tory' effect which most recently put former British Prime Minister David Cameron into 10 Downing Street.

"There's this phenomenon in British politics called the shy Tory referring to supporters of the Conservative party who might be too embarrassed to say they support the Conservatives so they tell pollsters they'll vote Labour but they show up and vote Conservative," Kondik elaborated. "There's a belief that there is a shy Trump vote in that people may feel it's not socially acceptable to vote for Trump but they'll do it anyway."

He added: "I also think polls still do a good job of predicting the outcome. Some people have cited the Brexit vote as an example of bad polling but I think the polls were very close for Brexit. It's just that a lot of people took it as an article of faith and went: 'How could the United Kingdom possibly leave the European Union?!' But the polls suggested that it could happen, and that was what happened."

"So if the polls tighten up here and Trump is down by just one or two points on Election day, we should not be very confident that Clinton will win. But the polls right now suggest a pretty big Clinton lead and if that holds up there is every reason to believe those polls will predict a Clinton win."

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER NOVEMBER 8TH?

According to the latest Sabato's Crystal Ball^[1] prediction, Clinton is on course to clinch 348 electoral votes – more than the 270 needed to become America's 45th president. Kondik pointed out the increased correlation between presidential and senate election and the likelihood of a Democrat-controlled Senate, albeit with a tiny majority.

"However, the Senate is cyclical," said Kondik. "Midterms almost always breaks against the President. So Clinton gets elected in 2016, but the Democrats have this very difficult Senate map to defend in 2018. The Democrats win the senate in 2016, but they will almost certainly lose it in 2018."

"If Trump indeed loses this election, you're gonna hear a lot about how the Republican Party in the United States is dead, and some new party needs to come along. Remember, the

Republican party is set up to have a very good midterm in 2018 just like they did in Obama's two midterms in 2010 and 2014."

While the Republican Party appears to be in turmoil, Kondik does not think a Trump defeat will spell the demise of the GOP while pointing out what happened the last time the Democrats lost three straight presidential contests, just as the Republicans are poised to do.

"The Democrats had their own time in the wilderness in the 1980s when they lost three straight Presidential elections. What happened to the Democrats after 1988 [when they lost their third straight] they kind of moderated their party. Bill Clinton was elected [as the Democratic nominee] in 1992 as the product of the Democratic Leadership Council, which was the moderate wing of the Democratic Party. The party realised it needed a new kind of candidate, and that's where Bill Clinton came into the picture.

"Perhaps, if Donald Trump loses, the Republicans might react the same way and produce a more moderate candidate who is more welcoming to minorities and fix their problems."